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Letter from Charles Godfrey Leland, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Anne Whitney, 1859 June 11

Charles Godfrey Leland

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Office Evening Bulletin
Philadelphia June 11 '59.

I do not know whether "Anne Whitney" should be prefaced by "Mrs" or "Miss", and so begin most abruptly and informally, what is an unparagonably abrupt and informal letter at best. But I do know that if genius is elevated above all titles, the prefix in your case can certainly be of no importance. And I trust that you will pardon the license which gentlemen of the editorial and reviewing fraternity are wont to take, and address those whose works they have aided in introducing to the public. It is a thing I have seldom or never done. Of the thousands — literally thousands — of books great and small which duty has obliged me to notice, not one in fact has ever tempted me to fly so directly in the face of etiquette as yours. The enclosed notice

which I have written, is my only
excuse for my outrageous dance in
thus addressing 'a total stranger'.
It has the one rare merit of
perfect truthfulness. You may
accept it on that ground as a
wonderful curiosity — it is I
believe no breach of etiquette
for a stranger to send to
M. Agassiz a rare specimen of
the rynchophora — and when
you hear it asserted that sincere,
heart-felt and perfectly disinter-
ested reviews are never written,
and least of all by old stagers,
may exhibit mine.

Testing apart, I have
spoken earnestly and from
my heart. I am no tyro and
rise far above such petty positions
as compliment or vanity when
I say that your volume con-
tains a nobler depth of poetry
than any American writer has
ever yet sounded. Others have
achieved a more popular form
— none have spoken so intimately
to my dearest thoughts as you
have done. Long years of analysis

of beauty in every form, whether in life, in history, in art or nature, from lectures on æsthetic affinities in German universities up to those deeper and better lectures which the heart teaches through infinite yearning and suffering and in hungering and thirsting for joyousness and loveliness and love — all of this has most peculiarly and marvellously inclined & qualified me to feel ~~to~~ even to full initiation the earnest force, the exquisite life of your poems.

Not less than in poetry, and art and I interested in humanity and progress. Of all points in the latter that of woman's capacity is by far to me the most interesting. I know no one so intensely, so sensitively awake to this great and glorious problem. ~~And~~ I fully believe in female genius and equality, and I arrived at this conclusion not through a theory or reading, but by the eminently practical

route of experience. I edited Graham's Magazine for more than two years and the letters from women which I read during that time made me study their character. My faith has a thousand foundation stones and every one a fact.

I fear that I have said too much for a stranger, though not enough for the truth. But no writer can rise so high, no body be so deeply entrenched in the fort of Reserve or of Conventionalism, that the sincere admiration of any one will not move them. "Crade experts Roberto" — believe me who has also been in that Arcadie.

I have written to your publisher for sheets of your book, that I may reprint some of your poems in the daily paper in which I am engaged. With all apology for this intrusion and sincerely trusting that you may speedily be appreciated by the whole world as you deserve I have the honor to be

Yours most respectfully
Charles G. Leland.